

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Jay Asher, an American novelist, who was born in Arcadia, California, on September 30th 1975, is widely known for his ability to extract story ideas from personal experience and true stories he heard. His powerful and emotional works, such as *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *The Future of Us*, and *What Light* reflect Asher's ability to express human experience in depth. In the world of literature, works like this do not just tell stories, but also depict deep ideas, feelings and thoughts about life.

Among Asher's works, *Thirteen Reasons Why* stands out as a masterpiece that has received many prestigious awards. This novel received a five-star rating from the Teen Book Review, an award as the best book from the Association of Booksellers for Children, and was recognized by the American Library Association as the best book for young adults. Apart from that, this novel was also included in Barnes & Noble's list of the 10 best young adult books and received the Best of the Best Books award from the Chicago Public Library. These awards show the huge impact that *Thirteen Reasons Why* has had in the world of youth literature, both in terms of narrative and the themes it addresses.

In the novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Hannah Baker is the protagonist who is suffering. Protagonist is the main character in a narrative who drives the plot and whose actions and decisions are central to the story's development (Ananda, 2023).

Hannah is portrayed as a teenage girl who struggles with the mental and emotional burdens inflicted by her environment. She represents the silent victims of bullying, isolation, and misunderstanding. She is a complex character whose vulnerability and pain are deeply explored throughout the narrative. Her suffering is revealed through a series of tapes she left behind, which show how other people's actions and words can have a huge impact on a person's feelings and mental state, especially those who are facing emotional difficulties.

According to Cassel (2004), suffering is a condition that a person feels when important aspects of his existence, such as health, freedom, or identity, are threatened or damaged. Suffering is not just about physical pain, but also involves emotional and spiritual dimensions. Suffering occurs in the lives of human beings in numerous manners.

Suffering was chosen for this research because it encapsulates the central theme explored in *Thirteen Reasons Why*. This theme reflects the psychological and emotional challenges faced by the protagonist, Hannah Baker, and examines how these experiences resonate universally with readers, particularly young adults. By focusing on suffering, this research aims to highlight its multifaceted nature including its emotional, social, and psychological dimensions and its profound impact on decision-making and interpersonal relationships. This title not only directs attention to the main issues in the novel but also emphasizes the broader significance of understanding suffering as a critical aspect of human experience.

Based on the description above, this research focuses on analyzing the protagonist's suffering, the types of suffering she experiences, the effects of Hannah's

suffering on the decisions she makes, and how this affects her in the *novel Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background provided, this study will address into two main problems, as follows:

1. What types of suffering does the protagonist experience in Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*?
2. What are the effects of the protagonist's suffering in Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the problems outlined above, this study aims to achieve two objectives, as follows:

1. To determine the types of suffering experienced by the protagonist in Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*.
2. To know the effects of the protagonist's suffering in Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the types and effects of suffering that affect the protagonist's in *Thirteen Reasons Why*. The research specifically examines how Hannah Baker's experiences of bullying, betrayal, social rejection, and misunderstandings contribute to her emotional distress. By analyzing her words,

actions, and thoughts, this study aims to understand the impact of these social experiences on her psychological well-being, self-perception, and interactions with others.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study has two significant aspects: theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study aims to provide readers with insights into the suffering experienced by protagonists in literary works and serves as a reference for other students who are writing on similar topics in their theses or dealing with issues of suffering. Practically, it is hoped that this study will offer direct benefits in the fields of education and mental health. Additionally, the completion of this research is necessary to obtain a bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Literature. Moreover, it is expected that the findings of this study will contribute to the advancement of literary studies, particularly for those interested in the field.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Protagonist

The protagonist is the main character in a story, play, or narrative who receives the most attention from the audience or readers. According to Putri & Wulan (2024), the protagonist is the character who drives the story, facing various challenges and often growing through the experience. Gaikwad (2016) also points out that the protagonist is the central figure in any form of storytelling, whether in literature, music, movies, or theater. Sinaga et al. (2023) explain that the protagonist is the character who earns the sympathy and support of the audience, making them a key emotional figure in the story. Raj, G. (1991) further describes the protagonist as the leading character in a play, whose actions and decisions shape the direction of the plot.

In conclusion, the protagonist is essential in any story as they guide the narrative and allow the audience or the reader to connect emotionally. This character's journey often represents the key themes and challenges of the story, making their role vital to the plot's impact.

2.2 Suffering

Suffering is a condition that causes individuals to experience loss both physically and emotionally. Nurbayani (2021) explains that suffering is a condition where a person feels disadvantaged, both physically and psychologically. This can

include severe physical pain or deep feelings of loss, affecting a person's mental and emotional state.

According to Tate & Pearlman (2019), suffering is also a very personal experience, where sufferers often feel isolated from their social environment and friends. This suffering is not only felt within the individual, but can also cause a feeling of isolation from the outside world, worsening their psychological condition. This isolated condition makes sufferers feel more alone and neglected in their struggle.

Meanwhile, Back (2015) added that suffering can lead to feelings of frustration and a desire to withdraw from social life. When individuals feel there is no way out of the suffering they are experiencing, frustration sets in and they may begin to withdraw from social interactions, worsening their feelings about the world and themselves.

Johnson (2023) revealed that suffering can also disappear from view, which means that someone who suffers is sometimes unable to express or identify the pain they feel, either to others or themselves. The inability to express suffering can worsen the condition, because the sufferer feels not understood.

Based on these various views, suffering can be defined as a complex response to pain, both physical and emotional, involving internal and external reactions. Suffering occurs when individuals experience deep pain, often accompanied by feelings of helplessness, frustration, and sometimes feelings of isolation from the social environment. This suffering is a personal experience that has a major influence on a person's mental and emotional condition, which can affect their life as a whole.

2.3 Types of Suffering

According to Quilao (2018), there are five types of suffering namely physical, psychological, social, existential, and ethical suffering. These types of suffering can be described as follows:

2.3.1 Physical Suffering

Physical suffering is a condition that arises as a result of the pain experienced by a person, which, if not handled properly, can worsen physical and mental conditions. Quilao (2018) explains that physical suffering encompasses any discomfort or pain affecting the body, often caused by injury, illness, or other physical strain. Similarly, Cassell (2004) notes that physical suffering can manifest in various ways, including acute or chronic pain, making it one of the most tangible forms of human distress. For example, a cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy may experience severe nausea, fatigue, and physical discomfort that hinder daily activities.

Such suffering often requires medical intervention, but it can also have a profound psychological impact, underscoring the interconnectedness between physical and emotional health. Additionally, physical suffering is measurable through symptoms such as swelling, inflammation, or limited mobility, providing healthcare professionals with observable indicators to assess and treat the condition effectively.

2.3.2 Psychological Suffering

Psychological suffering is related to a person's mental and emotional condition. Quilao (2018) emphasizes that this type of suffering arises from feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, or stress, often stemming from life events such as loss, trauma, or unresolved inner conflicts. Supporting this view, Frankl (2006), in *Man's Search for Meaning*, highlights that psychological suffering frequently emerges when individuals struggle to find meaning in their experiences or grapple with unfulfilled desires. For instance, a teenager facing relentless bullying at school may feel trapped in a cycle of rejection and despair. Such emotional turmoil can lead to long-term mental health issues, including low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts.

Unlike physical suffering, psychological suffering is often invisible, making it harder to diagnose and address. It affects a person's quality of life by diminishing their sense of purpose and mental well-being, requiring interventions such as counseling or therapy to alleviate the burden.

2.3.3 Social Suffering

Social suffering occurs when a person's social relationships are disrupted or lost. Quilao (2018) describes this suffering as arising from feelings of isolation, exclusion, or the breakdown of community support. In other words, social suffering is deeply influenced by societal structures and cultural norms, making it a collective phenomenon as much as an individual experience.

A poignant example is an elderly woman abandoned by her children, leaving her feeling disconnected and undervalued. This isolation can lead to profound emotional pain and a sense of purposelessness. Similarly, marginalized individuals

facing societal stigma may experience alienation, exacerbating their emotional distress. Social suffering highlights the importance of community support and interpersonal relationships in fostering a sense of belonging and emotional well-being.

2.3.4 Existential Suffering

Existential suffering arises when a person feels they have lost freedom and control over their life, especially when it comes to making decisions regarding their health. Quilao (2018) defines existential suffering as the distress experienced when individuals question their purpose, autonomy, and the meaning of their existence. This suffering is often linked to circumstances where individuals feel powerless or trapped in a situation that undermines their sense of self-worth. For instance, a terminally ill patient who is forced to rely entirely on others for basic needs may feel a loss of dignity and autonomy, leading to deep existential despair. Quilao also highlights that this type of suffering often involves a confrontation with one's mortality and the realization of human limitations. Such experiences can provoke intense anxiety but may also inspire individuals to seek new meaning or purpose in life.

2.3.5 Ethical Suffering

Ethical suffering refers to the emotional and psychological distress a person experiences when their dignity is violated or they are treated in a way that dehumanizes them. This form of suffering often stems from social stigma or exclusion, where individuals face judgment or marginalization due to illness,

disability, or other circumstances. The loss of respect and human dignity can have a profound impact on a person's sense of self-worth. Additionally, ethical suffering can emerge from deep existential questions, where individuals may struggle with the meaning of their lives, particularly when these concerns intersect with their spiritual beliefs. According to Quilao (2018), such suffering can lead to a crisis of faith, with some individuals questioning the purpose of their suffering and feeling betrayed by a higher power.

2.4 Effects of the Suffering

According to Anwar (2020) suffering has a big effect on a person's attitude, both positive and negative. Negative attitudes such as regret, disappointment, despair, and loss of passion for life, arise when someone is unable to manage their suffering. On the other hand, positive attitudes, such as optimism, creativity and determination, can help someone to rise and face life's challenges better. Below is a more detailed explanation of the effect of suffering according to Anwar (2020):

2.4.1 Negative Attitudes towards Suffering

Negative attitudes often arise when someone feels unable to face the suffering that befalls them. This is usually caused by a feeling that their suffering is too great and there is no way out. Some of them are:

1. Regret for Being Unhappy

Regret arises when individuals reflect on their lives and feel dissatisfaction or sorrow about their current circumstances. According to Gilovich and Medvec (1995), regret is "a negative cognitive/emotional state that involves blaming oneself for a bad

outcome, feeling a sense of loss or sorrow at what might have been, or wishing one could undo a previous choice." This emotional state often emerges when individuals perceive that they have missed opportunities or failed to achieve their potential. This feeling is frequently linked to the perception that others have achieved happiness or success that seems out of their reach. When people compare their own lives to those of others, they may experience a deep sense of regret for what they believe they have missed out on or failed to accomplish. This comparison can be particularly painful when they see others seemingly thriving, enjoying relationships, careers, or experiences that they desire but have not attained.

In the context of unhappiness, regret isn't just about past decisions or mistakes, but about the constant belief that they are destined to live a life filled with dissatisfaction and lost opportunities. It becomes a thought pattern that makes them feel inadequate and frustrated with their current situation. Instead of focusing on ways to grow or appreciating the good things in their lives, they keep thinking about what they don't have or what they've failed to accomplish. This ongoing cycle of comparing themselves to others and blaming themselves can seriously harm their self-esteem, making them feel unworthy of the success or happiness that others seem to enjoy. Over time, this leads to deeper feelings of hopelessness, making it harder to find happiness or satisfaction in the present. Rather than inspiring them to improve, regret keeps them stuck in negative thoughts, pushing them further away from the possibility of achieving fulfillment or emotional well-being.

2. Disappointed Attitudes

Disappointment occurs when there is a disconnect between a person's expectations and the reality they face. It often stems from the belief that something

was supposed to happen such as landing a desired job, achieving a goal, or experiencing success but the outcome falls short of what was anticipated. For instance, an individual may invest time and effort into preparing for an important interview, only to find out they didn't get the job, leaving them feeling let down. This sense of failure can lead to feelings of self-blame, frustration, and dissatisfaction, as the individual grapples with the gap between what they had hoped for and what actually transpired.

According to Anwar (2020), disappointment can become more than just a temporary feeling of dissatisfaction; it can turn into a pervasive attitude that negatively influences a person's outlook on life. When someone faces repeated disappointments or when expectations consistently go unmet, they may begin to generalize their feelings of disappointment to all aspects of life. This can result in a deep loss of confidence, causing the individual to question their abilities and worth. They may lose faith in their own potential or begin to feel that life is inherently unfair. As Anwar (2020) suggests, this widespread disappointment can lead to a sense of resignation, where the individual feels that no matter how hard they try, success or happiness will always be out of reach. Over time, this mindset can contribute to a negative cycle of hopelessness and low motivation, making it increasingly difficult to pursue future goals or engage positively with life.

3. Despair

Despair is a state of deep hopelessness, where a person loses any expectation or belief that things can improve. According to Beck et al. (1979), despair is "a loss of hope that the future can bring relief or improvement." Individuals in this condition feel as though their problems are insurmountable and that no matter what they do,

there is no solution. This hopelessness often leads to emotional paralysis, where the individual feels stuck, unable to take any action to better their situation. Desperate individuals might feel overwhelmed by the weight of their struggles and develop a sense of futility, thinking that all their efforts will be in vain. This can be further compounded by negative thinking patterns, where they see no way forward and feel that any attempt to overcome their challenges will be pointless. As a result, they may withdraw from others, stop pursuing goals, and become increasingly isolated, trapped in a cycle of negative emotions. Despair is often linked to depression, and if not addressed, it can lead to severe mental health issues.

4. Desire to Suicide

In extreme cases, the intensity of suffering can lead individuals to believe that ending their lives is the only way to escape the pain. The desire to commit suicide is a tragic and severe response to prolonged emotional or psychological distress. People who experience this often feel isolated, believing that no one cares about them or that their lives lack meaning. They may also feel that their suffering will never end and that there is no hope for the future. This overwhelming sense of hopelessness can make individuals feel as if they are a burden to others or that their existence no longer serves any purpose. For these individuals, suicide may seem like a way to end the unbearable emotional turmoil. It's important to recognize that this is a cry for help, and anyone experiencing such feelings should seek professional support immediately. Prevention and intervention are critical in these cases to help individuals regain hope and find healthier ways to cope with their suffering.

5. Anti-Attitude towards Life

An anti-life attitude is a mindset that develops in response to prolonged suffering or trauma. People who have experienced significant emotional pain, such as from a broken relationship or deep betrayal, may develop a defensive attitude toward life. They often reject the idea of future happiness, fearing that they will only face more suffering. This can manifest in a reluctance to form new relationships or engage in new experiences, as they anticipate future pain. One common example of this attitude is a person who, after experiencing a painful breakup, swears off future relationships, believing that love will only lead to hurt. In addition, those who are immersed in their suffering may lose their passion for life. They no longer find joy in activities they once enjoyed or pursue things that once motivated them. This anti-life attitude can lead to a diminished sense of purpose, where life is seen as a series of hardships rather than opportunities for growth and happiness. Over time, this mindset can worsen the quality of life, as individuals become trapped in negative thinking, unable to see past their current pain. They stop searching for ways to improve their situation and miss out on opportunities for healing, personal growth, and fulfillment. This attitude, if left unchecked, can lead to greater isolation, depression, and a loss of hope for the future.

2.4.2 Positive Attitudes towards Suffering

While suffering can be a difficult experience, some individuals manage to face it with a positive attitude. This mindset allows them to rise above adversity and find new meaning and purpose in life. Positive attitudes towards suffering can help individuals to not only endure challenges but to grow stronger and more resilient

through them. According to Anwar (2020), these positive attitudes are crucial for transforming suffering into an opportunity for personal growth and achievement. Below are several key positive attitudes that can help individuals cope with suffering:

1. Optimism in the Face of Suffering

Optimism refers to the belief that despite difficulties, good things will happen in the future and that challenges are temporary. Optimists see suffering as an inevitable part of life that can be overcome, not as something that defines their entire existence. This attitude allows them to face hardship with a hopeful outlook, searching for solutions rather than giving in to despair. They view suffering as a challenge to be conquered, rather than as an insurmountable obstacle. Anwar (2020) suggests that optimism is a key factor in helping individuals maintain mental and emotional stability in times of distress. Optimistic individuals are more likely to maintain a clear mind, enabling them to think logically and effectively navigate through difficult situations. This perspective makes it easier to see suffering as something to learn from, rather than something that will permanently hold them back.

2. Belief that Life is Not Just a Series of Suffering

Individuals with this positive attitude understand that life is a mixture of both joy and sorrow. They believe that suffering, though painful, is only a temporary phase in the larger course of life, and that happiness and fulfillment can follow. This belief helps them maintain a sense of hope, even during difficult times. Rather than feeling trapped by sadness, they see it as part of a broader life experience that includes moments of happiness and achievement. According to Anwar (2020), this

mindset prevents individuals from becoming overwhelmed by negative emotions, as they recognize that their struggles will eventually be followed by positive outcomes. This belief provides them with the strength to continue forward, knowing that happiness is possible and worth striving for.

3. Creative Attitude

Some people possess the ability to transform their suffering into something useful or meaningful by adopting a creative attitude. This can be seen in the works of artists, writers, or musicians who channel their painful experiences into creative expressions. These individuals do not view suffering as something purely negative but as an opportunity for creative growth. For example, a writer might write a novel based on personal hardship, or an artist may create a painting that reflects the emotional struggle they've endured. This approach not only helps them process their suffering but also benefits others by providing new perspectives or inspirational works of art. Anwar (2020) highlights how creativity, when paired with suffering, can become a powerful coping mechanism. Creative individuals are often able to convert their pain into a source of empowerment, and through their work, they contribute to society in meaningful ways.

4. Not Giving Up Easily

People who possess this attitude refuse to quit, even after multiple failures. They view each failure as a lesson that brings them closer to their ultimate goal. This persistence is what often leads to success, as they continue to try new strategies and approaches, even when faced with setbacks. The belief that failure is not permanent but rather part of the process of growth helps individuals to stay focused and motivated. Anwar (2020) asserts that resilience in the face of failure is essential for

overcoming suffering. People who do not give up easily tend to develop a stronger sense of determination and are more likely to succeed in the long term, as they learn from their mistakes and adapt. This ability to persist, no matter how many times they fail, makes it possible for them to eventually overcome obstacles that would have otherwise seemed impossible.